

Helping Adult Students Achieve Success: What Works and What Doesn't

2016 Student Success Summit: Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education

Why are you serving adult students? Is it part of your mission? Are you doing it because there has been a decline in the 18-22 year olds? Or do you look at it as a new revenue source?

What adult population are you targeting? First time students, returning students, undergrad, grad? Is it going to be a night program, weekend program, can they go during the day?

Do you have buy in from the entire college/university? What have you done to get buy in?

Is your college adult student friendly?

Start with you admission's office? Are there any admission staff above the age of 22? Are there admissions staff who can relate to the experiences, anxieties, etc. of adult students? Do you have a communication plan that speaks to the adult student? How do you communicate with them—e-mail, chats, texting, etc.

What do the marketing materials look like? Do they speak to the adult or do the pictures and material speak to students and their parents? What about your web site?

What about your policies? Are they adult friendly? What is your transfer policy? Do you have an academic forgiveness policy?

What is your policy on transfer? Are you transfer-friendly or do you put up a lot of road blocks?

Do you require students to take a placement exam upon entry? And if so, do you provide them with a way of brushing up their skills before taking the exam, especially if it is a math assessment? Do you do any other kinds of assessments? Do you use a "grit" survey or resiliency survey?

What is your policy on prior learning assessment—portfolio, military credit, testing, ACE, etc? How is it treated? Do you count your portfolio credit as transfer credit or your own credit?

What degrees do you offer? Do you have a general studies degree? Are the courses for the degree totally available for the students? Are the programs of the same quality as the same programs offered to the traditional age students? Are they degrees stackable?

Have you analyzed what the length of the term will be? 8 week, 15 week? Courses meeting one night a week, two nights a week, weekend?

Are you going to offer the program online or just on ground? Adults tend to be busy.

What kind of supports are you going to have in place? If you offer courses on the weekend or evenings are the offices open? Is food service going to be available? Is the learning center open?

Do you have an orientation for adult students?

Do you have accessibility services?

If you offer courses online, have you put in an orientation process to help them learn your learning management system? Is your library available online? Is tutoring available online?

Do you have a strong advising system? Do you use intrusive advising? Do you have analytics in place?

Do you offer tutoring? Is it free? Is it available when the students are on campus?

What do you do about drop outs? Do you have a plan to recruit them?

What about your registration process? Is it adult friendly? Adults tend to register late? When do you stop your registration?

Do you have a payment plan? Accept credit cards? E-checks? Pay online?

What about your financial aid office? Is it open when your students are on campus? Can they do everything electronically? The same with your business office?

How do you connect the adult student to the campus? Some of the on ground students will want to come and just take the courses and go home; others are looking for a more typical college experience. They want that student experience they missed out on. And then there is a large group in the middle. Do you have a student government for adult students? Are the adults on college-wide committees so their voices can be heard? Do you plan social events or educational events for the adults? Do you have a newsletter that targets the adults? Are they invited to all college activities? Do you have a chapter of Alpha Sigma Lambda, the adult student honor society?

How do you connect the online students? Do you offer webinars on things that students might be interested in? Have sessions so they can meet their faculty? Have a chat room where students can meet each other? Do you use the newsletter so they know about the college, faculty, etc.?

Do you make it easy for students to get assistance, especially if you are offering online programs? Do you have a 24/7 help desk? Do you have a FA help desk?

Do you offer career services for adults—do you offer anything for your at-a-distance students?

Have you looked at your courses? Do they draw upon the experiences of the adult students? Are the teachers interested in teaching adults or are they intimidated by adults? Are the courses as demanding as your regular courses—they should be? Andragogy vs pedagogy?

What about graduation? How do you include your online students?

If you already have adult students, what do you know about them? We all tend to have a lot of data, but are you using that data? For example, we found that our students are getting younger, coming in with fewer credits, and more-needy and as a result our retention rate has dropped slightly. This has

changed our advising and course offerings. Students are taking more of our courses, need more tutoring, and can complete a concentration—so we saw a decline in our individualized studies degree.

We are also having more students coming with diagnosed learning disabilities? Therefore, we have expanded our accessibility services and ramped up our timeline for having all of our courses completely ADA compliant.

We put in a new student survey in place to measure the experience a new student has? It showed that we needed to improve our business office and financial office services, which we have done.

Our students told us that they wanted career services—so we have implemented online career services.

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